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Your Views

Nature can clean up Superfund site

By GLEN EKBERG

Special to the Rockford Register Star

I appreciate the opportunity to provide relevant facts and to correct some inaccuracies found in a May 11 Register Star editorial about the Environmental Protection Agency and the southeast Rockford Superfund.

First, the EPA, Register Star Editorial Board and I agree that public health should be our paramount concern. Having that as a basis, I was concerned why the articles omitted the proven existence of a natural clay liner at Ekberg/Pine Manor Park, also known as Area 7.

THE EPA'S OWN data shows this has protected public health since the 1950s and early '60s by minimizing the spread of pollution. In a 1995 official document, the EPA's own consultant said to leave this clay liner undisturbed. Unfortunately, the EPA disregarded its own information and proceeded to drill more holes through the liner. That is why I was concerned with the access of the EPA to this property. In addition to minimizing the pollution spread, this liner reduces the urgency to push ahead recklessly with the expensive man-made remedies. It also has kept the pollution nearer to the surface where the well-documented natural forces (i.e. cottonwood and alfalfa roots) of bio-

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degradation have an even better chance of working.

Another benefit to public health that the RRS chose not to dwell on was the dramatic reduction of pollution in Area 7. From 1993 to 2003 the EPA's own certified tests of the monitor wells near Area 7 show an average drop of approximately 70 percent. For example, a test well located near the southwest edge of Ekberg/Pine Manor Park showed a drop in the 1,1,1 TCE concentration from 7.9 parts per million to .3 PPM, well within the drinking water standard.

THE GEOLOGY DEPARTMENT at NIU said the property exhibits the classic elements of natural attenuation (cleanup): It also accepted my invitation to conduct field studies on the property at no cost to the taxpayer. When EPA spokesman Terry Ayers claimed outside cleanup help was necessary, I believe it was more an unwillingness to admit the possibility their Record of Decision was in error. The EPA has always said that, if possible, the preferred remedy is natural attenuation. That way they could conserve the precious cleanup dollars for the more challenged sites.

An ironic element of the articles was the EPA's decision to approve natural attenuation for other much more dangerous sites in the stateline area. The Evergreen Manor subdivision in Roscoe, sitting directly on top of a pollution plume, has had indoor air tests showing dangerously elevated levels of benzene, TCE, PCE and chloroform. Homes in the Pine Manor subdivision next to the Area 7 site have undergone the same battery of tests, and all of them show pollution levels below national average and within cleanup standards.

Another negative example showing this EPA inconsistency is Area 11, near the corner of 11th Street and Harrison Avenue. At monitor well No. 102 next to the former Rockford Varnish Co., the EPA reported dangerously high organic contaminant levels of over 1,100 PPM. This is over 150 times the pollution level at Area 7, but Area 11 was granted a natural attenuation status. What this shows is that the EPA has an incredibly wide latitude of discretion in establishing the criteria for cleanup.

I WANT TO THANK the Register Star for clarifying the pollution in Area 7 was dumped there in the '50s and early '60s, before I owned the property. I was com-

pletely unaware of the condition of the land until the EPA drilled test wells in the early 1990s. After that point, I helped the EPA find that Roto-Rooter dumped industrial liquid wastes on George Johnson's farm property. Furthermore, my exemption from cleanup liability was codified into law in December of 2001 with the Brownfields Revitalization Act.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE EPA once again skirted the rules and my innocence, and is currently suing me. One of the editorial arguments was that I didn't participate in the extortion covenant. Actually I did offer to give \$20,000 toward the cleanup, which I thought was pretty generous in light of my innocence. This offer was rejected. To top this entire nightmare situation off, the federal judge in Rockford has denied me one of my most precious rights, a trial by a jury of my peers.

I want public health in regards to our environment to be protected and improved. I just wish the EPA and the federal government would follow their own data, be fair and follow commonsense rules. I invite Terry Ayers and other EPA officials to openly discuss the technical aspects of the site.

Glen Ekberg is a Rockford resident.

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